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The Art of Beautiful Writing

As Practised before the Invention
of Printing

Examples written by
Miss Elizabeth H. Webb

Shown by the
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The Art of Beautiful Writing

Calligraphy, the Art of Beautiful Writing as it has been called, died out with the invention of printing in the 15th Century. The first person of modern times to revive it was William Morris, who made a study of the most admired examples of the best periods and used his knowledge in the making of printed as well as MSS. books.

In recent years Edward Johnston, of London, has further revived the craft. He is teaching it by the direct method instead of by the laborious and indirect method of copying the texts of old MSS. His theory is that with the same tool which the old writers used, a quill pen so cut as to give strokes like those found in old MSS., and by a careful study of each stroke made in forming letters and by long and patient practice, present day writing can disclose the same freedom and feeling, can be as sensitive to the writer's power and mood and can possess the same beauty as did the old. These results are obviously impossible by the indirect method of blocking out the letters with a pencil and then filling in with ink.

It is the purpose of the writings displayed in this exhibit to show the more distinctive and more beautiful book hands of several centuries, beginning with the fourth and ending with the fifteenth. All of the examples shown were written, after Mr. Johnston's method, free hand, with a quill pen and with no preliminary blocking out.

The first aim of the calligrapher should be readableness and the second fitness for the given use; readableness, beauty and the indefinable quality we call character—due to the personality of the writer—being the accepted prime qualities of good writing.

Black letter, though one of the most picturesque and decorative of all letter forms, should be debarred from ordinary use because of its comparative illegibility. It may properly be used almost solely for mottoes and short decorative inscriptions where readableness is not the first requisite.

Mr. Cobden Sanderson says in "The Book Beautiful": "Every printer, and indeed every one having to do with the making of printed books, should ground himself in the practice or knowledge of the Art of Beautiful Writing, of Calligraphy, and let both hand and soul luxuriate and rejoice for awhile in the art of Illuminating. Such practice would keep Type alive under the influence of an ever-living and fluent prototype."

And Mr. Ruskin says, "Perfect Illumination is only writing made lovely; * * * * but to make writing itself beautiful—to make the sweep of the pen lovely—is The Art of Illumination."

List of Writings Shown

1. Copy of Greek Uncials of the 5th Century from the Codex Alexandrinus.
2. Square Capitals, one of the two great book hands of the 4th Century.

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3. Rustic Capitals, one of the two great book hands of the 4th Century.
 4. Rustic Capitals of the 10th Century.
 5. Uncial writing of the 6th or 7th Century, Italian.
 6. Four Gospels in Uncials—from an 8th Century copy in the British Museum.
 7. Psalter in Uncials, 8th Century.
 8. From the famous Durham Book of the 8th Century, written in half uncials.
 9. Uncial writing for modern use.
 10. Half uncials for modern use.
 11. Colored versals of the 10th Century.
 12. Roman Hand of the 12th Century on which the Italian scribes of the 15th Century founded their hand, which is, in effect, our modern type.
 13. Italic hand of the 15th Century, Italian.
 14. Italian formal hand of the 15th Century.
 15. Slanted pen round capitals.
 16. Slanted pen square capitals.
 17. Pen-made Roman capitals.
 18. English Black Letter of the 13th Century.
 19. Italian Black Letter. The Italians never quite got away from the rounded form of the Roman hand.
 20. Modern Black Letter.
 21. Page of writing in half uncials.
 22. Page of Italic writing.
 23. Italic writing with colored versals.
 - 23a. English slanted pen, 10th Century hand.
 24. Roman small-letter hand.

25. Flourished capitals, punctuation and numerals.
26. Page of half uncials with heading in scarlet uncials.
27. Italic writing with flourished capitals.
28. Pater Noster in gold semi-uncials.
29. Text in uncials with gilded initial.
30. Poem in Italic hand with gold initials and line finishings.
31. Gettysburg address with first line in gold capitals. Written in Italic hand.
32. Modern Roman small letter-hand in gold.

FACSIMILES.

To the above has been added the following group of examples of writing and of printing, selected from the library's collection by Miss Webb:

33. Latin, 2nd Century.
34. Rustic capitals, 4th Century.
35. Square capitals. MS. of Vergil.
36. Latin, 6th Century.
37. Latin, 9th Century.
38. English, 14th Century.
39. Italian, written at Venice by Nicolaus Jenson Gallicus in 1476.
40. Italian of the 15th Century written at Venice by Nicolaus Jenson Gallicus.
41. Italian of 15th Century.
42. Italian, 2nd half of the 15th Century.

Six modern German type faces showing influence of ancient handwritings.

BOOKS WRITTEN BY MISS WEBB.

1. 119th psalm in English, 10th Century hand.
 2. Canticle to the Sun with title page in gold.
 3. Canticle to the Sun with gold and barbaric title page with text written in Roman hand.
 4. Little flowers of St. Francis in Italic hand.
 5. Nativity in gold title page and Italic hand.
 6. Canticle to the Sun in gold capitals on purple vellum after 7th Century Royal MSS.
 7. Gettysburg address in Italic hand with capitals.
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OF ANCIENT WRITING.

“Nearly all the principal methods of ancient writing may be divided into square capitals, rounded capitals, and cursive letters; the square capitals being termed simply *capitals*, the rounded capitals *uncials*, and the small letters, or such as had changed their form during the creation of a running hand, *minuscule*. Capitals are, strictly speaking, such letters as retain the earliest settled form of an alphabet; being generally of such angular shapes as could conveniently be carved on wood or stone, or engraved in metal, to be stamped on coins. The earliest Latin MSS. known are written entirely in capitals, like inscriptions in metal or marble.

The uncial letters, as they are termed, appear to have arisen as writing on papyrus or vellum became common, when many of the straight lines of the capitals, in that kind of writing, gradually acquired a

curved form, to facilitate their more rapid execution. However this may be, from the 6th to the 9th, or even 10th century, these uncials or partly-rounded capitals prevail.

The modern minuscule, differing from the ancient cursive character, appears to have arisen in the following manner: during the 6th and 7th centuries, a kind of transition style prevailed in Italy, and some other parts of Europe, the letters composing which have been termed *semi-uncials*, which, in a further transition, become more like those of the old Roman cursive. This manner, when definitely formed, became what is now termed the minuscule manner; it began to prevail over uncials in a certain class of MSS. about the 8th century, and towards the 10th its general use was, with few exceptions, established. It is said to have been occasionally used as early as the 5th century; but I am unable to cite an authentic existing monument. The Psalter of Alfred the Great, written in the 9th century, is in a small Roman cursive hand, which has induced Casley to consider it the work of some Italian ecclesiastic."

Extract from Noel Humphrey's work "On the Origin and Progress of the Art of Writing" in *The Art of Illuminating*, by W. R. Tymms.

And David lamented
w. this lamentation:
The second book of Sam-
uel, chapter one, verse 20.
TELL IT NOT IN GATH
 PUBLISH IT NOT IN THE
 STREETS OF ASKELOH

lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice
 lest the daughters of the uncircumcised tri-
 umph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be
 no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you
 nor fields of offerings: for there the shield
 of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield
 of Saul, as though he had not been an-
 ointed with oil. From the blood of the slain,
 from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jona-
 than turned not back, and the sword of
 Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jona-
 than were lovely and pleasant in their lives
 and in their death they were not divided:
 they were swifter than eagles, they were
 stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel
 weep over Saul, who clothed you in scar-
 let, with other delights, who put on orna-
 ments of gold upon your apparel. How
 are the mighty fallen in the midst of the
 battle! O Jonathan thou wast slain in thine
 high places. I am distressed for thee, my bro-
 ther Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou
 been unto me: thy love to me was wonder-
 ful, passing the love of women. How are
 the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war
 P E R I S H E D.

